



Representative Louise M. Slaughter
Chairwoman, House Committee on Rules
Representing New York's 28th District

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, May 22, 2008

Rep. Slaughter Speaks In Support of Waterfront Brownfields Revitalization

Insists on Need For Legislation To Help Clean Up Contaminated Waterfronts

Washington, DC – Congresswoman Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Committee on Rules, today delivered remarks in support of waterfront brownfields revival at the 2008 Waterfront Summit in Washington, DC. The Summit was hosted by the American Waterfront Revitalization Coalition, an advocacy organization dedicated to helping communities rediscover their waterfronts. Rochester, NY is a member of the Coalition.

Rep. Slaughter is a strong advocate of waterfront brownfields clean-up efforts and early this year, introduced H.R. 5469, the Waterfront Brownfields Revitalization Act. This legislation will support communities seeking to overcome the unique challenges of renewing waterfront brownfield properties.

“America’s industrial heritage was established along the banks of its rivers, lakes and coasts,” said Rep. Slaughter. **“Unfortunately, that legacy has come at the price of contaminating our waterfronts, and today, we find abandoned factories and dilapidated mills scattering the shores of Western New York and the country.”**

“The unique roadblocks created by these brownfields threaten to spoil community efforts to rejuvenate their downtowns and attract tourists,” Slaughter continued. **“It is critically important that the Federal government partners with cities and towns to address the unique challenges of waterfront brownfields and transform them into community assets.”**

Currently, the Waterfront Brownfields Revitalization Act has 27 cosponsors. Following today’s event, summit attendees will ask their respective Members of Congress to support Rep. Slaughter’s bill.

Rep. Slaughter was introduced by Mark Gregor from the City of Rochester Division of Environmental Quality.

BACKGROUND

Waterfront brownfields present challenges beyond typical environmental assessment and cleanup projects. Hydrology, water quality, wetlands, endangered species, habitat, dredged materials, flooding, environmental infrastructure, navigation, and other considerations must be carefully addressed so as not to exacerbate existing site contamination. As such, waterfront brownfields require special attention and resources to overcome their larger hurdles.

Under the Waterfront Brownfields Revitalization Act, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would be authorized to establish a waterfront brownfields pilot demonstration program to provide local communities with up to \$500,000 per grantee to assist and showcase communities that are overcoming the unique challenges of waterfront brownfields.

Grants may be used for a variety of waterfront brownfields-related purposes including reuse planning, design and engineering, technical assistance and capacity building, and waterfront brownfields assessment and cleanup.

The Waterfront Brownfields Revitalization Act also establishes an interagency taskforce on waterfront brownfields restoration. The taskforce would identify current and potential resources for waterfront brownfields revitalization, identify barriers and potential solutions to waterfront brownfields revitalization, and identify methods for federal interagency collaboration on such projects. The taskforce would be required to provide a report to Congress on these issues no later than 3 years after the date of enactment of this legislation.

The full text of Rep. Slaughter's prepared remarks are below:

I would like to extend my thanks to the American Waterfront Revitalization Coalition for hosting this important summit and inviting me to speak on an issue that is extremely important to the economic development of my district and scores of districts across the country.

I would also like to thank you all for coming to Washington to convene on the issue of brownfields development. I am certain that innovating new approaches and strategies to cleaning up your communities' brownfields happen through a meeting of the minds like this.

And thank you for meeting with your Members of Congress to enlist support for these efforts. This is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to work together and promote a stronger local-federal partnership for waterfront revitalization.

America's industrial heritage was established along the banks of its rivers, lakes and coasts. Our nation's vast and interconnected natural water system helped provide the power that fueled our rise to international prominence, and allowed us to move our manufactured goods efficiently to all corners of the country.

However, that legacy also includes many decades of environmental contamination on the waterfront. Abandoned factories, dilapidated mills and underutilized ports can be found along the shores of many metropolitan areas. As localities seek to reconnect with their waterfronts and revitalize their downtowns, brownfield barriers threaten to derail community efforts to create jobs, promote recreational opportunities, restore ecosystems, increase tourism, and grow their tax base.

A special member of the Waterfront Revitalization Coalition, Rochester, New York, is dealing with this legacy and its consequences. The city is undertaking a major community revitalization strategy to redevelop its port and waterfront area into a mixed use development, which will include housing, commercial, retail, and educational uses, enhanced recreation, new parks and open space, and improved public access to Lake Ontario, the Genesee River and the surrounding ecosystem.

However, because the Port of Rochester was used extensively for industrial purposes from the late 1800s into the first half of the 20th century, significant environmental remediation will be required prior to redevelopment.

Initial investigations have found that more than ten acres of the site contain up to several feet of slag from a former iron works. Portions of the site are impacted from petroleum releases and unsuitable fill materials. Old Genesee River deposits on the site and bank sediments have been shown to contain high levels of heavy metals as well as pesticides. The marina must also be dredged.

Before the waterfront reuse can proceed, the Port of Rochester must first address environmental assessment issues related to contaminated sediments, beneficial reuse of sediments, groundwater contamination, and waste characterization related to the construction of the marina – and an unknown level of remediation. None of these challenges sound foreign to you, I am sure.

Niagara Falls is another city in my district faced with the challenges of brownfields redevelopment. The City's brownfields are the remains of an industrial economy that has lost two-thirds of its industrial jobs over the last four decades. With the factories now closed, these industrial and commercial sites sit stagnant throughout Niagara Falls. However, the City is leading a concerted effort to redevelop these brownfields sites throughout the city.

One particular area of the city, comprising one thousand eight hundred acres, borders the Upper Niagara River and contains several brownfield sites. The City and its residents are eager to reconnect with their river waterfront, and I am working hard with them to advance revitalization along this waterfront.

Of course, as you all know, cities in my district are not alone in facing these types of complicated and expensive challenges to redevelopment. Cities all across the country are dealing with similar roadblocks as they try to incorporate waterfront real estate into their redevelopment plans.

From Yuma, Arizona and Portland, Oregon in the west, to Savannah, Georgia, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the east, and almost everywhere in between where lakes and rivers exist. And undoubtedly, some of these areas are not capitalizing on the full potential of their great waterfronts.

You all know as well as I do that communities in the process of redeveloping their brownfields are increasing their tax base, creating jobs, making communities more livable, and promoting conservation efforts. Over one hundred cities surveyed estimated that redeveloping their brownfields sites could lead to \$2.2 billion a year in local tax revenue. According to the EPA, brownfields redevelopment generates \$9.9 billion in new investment per year along with hundreds of thousands of jobs. Moreover, one acre of redeveloped brownfields "saves" four point five acres of land from contamination and pollution, helping us conserve and renew our environment.

For all of these reasons, I introduced H.R. 5469, the Waterfront Brownfields Revitalization Act. My bill recognizes that the federal government can be an effective partner with communities interested in reconnecting with their waterfronts.

Waterfront brownfields present challenges beyond typical environmental assessment and cleanup projects. Hydrology, water quality, wetlands, endangered species, habitat, dredged materials, flooding, environmental infrastructure, navigation, and other considerations must be carefully addressed so as not to exacerbate existing site contamination.

Typically, waterfront brownfields require the involvement of multiple governmental agencies. As such, waterfront brownfields require special attention and resources to overcome their larger hurdles.

Specifically, this legislation would authorize the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to establish a waterfront brownfields pilot demonstration program that will provide localities and other eligible entities with up to \$500,000 to assess and clean up waterfront brownfields.

The bill would also establish an interagency taskforce on waterfront brownfields restoration to identify barriers and potential solutions to waterfront brownfields revitalization, and seek methods for federal interagency collaboration on such projects.

As cities across the country struggle to thrive in a changing global economy, and as our domestic manufacturing continues to diminish, it is imperative that Congress do all that it can to help these cities redevelop and succeed.

Industrialization and manufacturing helped make this country the power that it is today, but as manufacturing has moved overseas it has not only taken jobs and changed the economic base of many industrial cities, it has also left behind decades of contamination.

This legislation will give these cities the support they need to redevelop in an environmentally safe way, and utilize their waterfront as the incredible economic asset it should be.

Since introducing this legislation in February of this year, 27 of my colleagues have signed on as cosponsors to my bill. I am delighted that many of your Representatives and my colleagues in the House have recognized that the federal government can be an effective partner in waterfront brownfields redevelopment by cosponsoring my bill.

But more work needs to be done to advance this legislation. By increasing cosponsors on the bill, we can send a strong message to my colleagues indicating a huge need for a waterfront brownfields grant program.

I am also working to have my bill incorporated into a larger brownfields reauthorization act this year that has been introduced by my colleague, Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson on the Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment. Chairwoman Johnson has made brownfields programs reauthorization a priority.

When you visit with your Representatives today, please thank them for their support of this legislation if they have already signed on as cosponsors. You should also underscore how this bill will enhance your ability to transform your waterfronts.

For those of you meeting with Members who have yet to cosponsor this legislation, I trust that your advocacy efforts will send a strong signal to Congress indicating that this legislation will bring great benefits to congressional districts across the country. So thank you all in advance for your support in furthering this legislation. And more importantly, thank you all for your tireless and amazing efforts in restoring our nation's waterfronts, and transforming them into remarkable assets that our communities rightfully deserve.

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